

Parents often approach me with questions about what is common and developmentally appropriate for their child's age, so the school counselor at St. Joseph and I researched and compiled information about 1st graders. Be aware that children move through these stages at different rates, some sooner, some later. I hope this is helpful - Denise Rouso, St Anne School Counselor

Your First Grader

Common Cognitive, Social and Emotional Developmental Behaviors of 1st Graders*

Cognitive

- First grade is a time of dramatic cognitive and emotional growth. The cerebral cortex is rapidly growing, especially in the areas of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. At this key neurological stage, your 1st grader will thrive if you talk and read with her/him as often as possible.
- "Industrious" is the word that best describes 1st graders. However, their enthusiasm can outstrip their skills, causing them to take on too much work-wise.
- Attention span is 6 – 20 minutes, with many boys typically having shorter attention spans. Think about limiting screen time, as some studies indicate screens over stimulate the emerging neurology, which can result in abbreviated attention.
- Enjoys the process more than the product.
- Dishonesty peaks at age 6, especially if asked directly to admit wrongdoing. This is in part due to their new developmental ability to realize that others can have differing thoughts than them.
- Can use teasing, bossing, tattling, tantrums and complaining to try out relationships with authority. (This is to be understood but not to be excessively tolerated).
- Wants it all, has difficulty making choices.
- Begins to be less influenced by happenings at home than at school.

Social/Emotional Behaviors

- Your first grader's brain is leaping from magical thinking to logical and rational mental processes, making them eager to learn rules and regulations and causing them to become more fixated on justice and fairness. Although this may drive the adults in their life nuts, it is actually a positive developmental stage!
- When asked *why* they feel certain emotions, many 1st graders will have a hard time explaining why they might be feeling sad, scared or mad. This is because the cerebral cortex is not yet connected to the amygdala (a primitive area where emotion occurs), making it difficult for them to convey their feelings into words.
- Competitive and enthusiastic. Strong need to win; may change or invent rules to suit her/him. Because of this intense desire to be first, it's important for adults to take the competitive edge off of games.
- Can be extremely sensitive and will respond *strongly* to both encouragement *and* criticism. Difficult for them to accept blame and punishment.
- Cares a great deal about friends; may have a best friend.
- Very emotional-functions at opposite extremes.

Communication Style

- Loves jokes and guessing games.
- Enjoying explaining things.
- Tends to frequently complain.

You're the best judge of your child's development and what is "normal" for him or her. Just when you think you've figured out your child, something changes. You may find strategies that once worked no longer have any impact on him or her. Don't worry, this is normal. If you would like more resources or information, please contact your pediatrician or you may contact Denise Rouso, (206) 283-3538, ext. 115 or at drouso@stannesea.org.

**Information compiled by Denise Rouso, St. Anne School Counselor, and Jennifer Moyer-Taylor, St. Joseph School Counselor. References on back.*

My Son Worries That His Friends Don't Like Him

By Debra Collins, Family therapist, from *greatschools.com website*

QUESTION:

My first-grader is very sensitive. He's always worried about not having any friends. He has lots of friends in his class. But if they disagree with him or refuse to share, he thinks that they are being rude and that they don't like him anymore. The next day or five minutes later everything is fine. But this worries him. I don't know how to assure him that they like him and just not to worry about this. Help me help him. I don't want him to grow up insecure and just a follower.

ANSWER:

How wonderful that your son has lots of friends. More often we hear about trends of early aggression in boys, not camaraderie.

Your son is learning about peer relationships. It is difficult to navigate different temperaments and interaction styles. There is bound to be some conflict. It is common for children at his age to feel slighted and then have it blow over in five minutes.

But ask his teacher about his interactions. Teachers usually have a sense of age-appropriate behavior. You can also arrange play dates at home or other non-competitive socialization opportunities for more peer-interaction practice.

It is a natural reaction for a parent to want her child to be happy and successful in his relationships. However, sometimes our own fears about his well being may be misinterpreted by the child. Without knowing all the details, I can only give you what I think may be another contributing factor based on how you worded your question. You stated that your son is "very sensitive" and that you "don't want him to grow up insecure and just a follower." Is it possible that he has misinterpreted your reassurance? He may perceive people disagreeing with him or concerned about him as not liking him. An adult understands that you want your son to be resilient and independent, but a 6-year-old may view this as rejection.

Children at this age think in literal terms. If you think this may be a possibility, you might want to gently explore with him who else he fears may not like him when there are disagreements. Reassuring him about how you feel about him may straighten out any miscommunication and help him relax his concerns about not being likeable.

Advice from Great Schools' experts is not a substitute for professional diagnosis or treatment from a health-care provider or learning expert familiar with your unique situation. Great Schools recommends consulting a qualified professional if you have concerns about your child's condition. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, consult your pediatrician.

References:

Ames, L.B., Baker, S.M. (1981). *Child Behavior*. Harper & Row: New York. Pellissier, Hank. Retrieved on August, 31, 2011. <http://www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/slideshows/4451-brain-first-grade.gs>.

In *Social Skills*. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/1349-my-son-worries-that-his-friends-don't-like-him.gs>

Pellissier, Hank, *Health and Behavior*. Retrieved November 9, 2011, <http://www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/slideshows/4391-brain-first-grade.gs>.

Wood, Chip (1997). *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom 4-14*. Maine: Northeast Foundation for Children.

